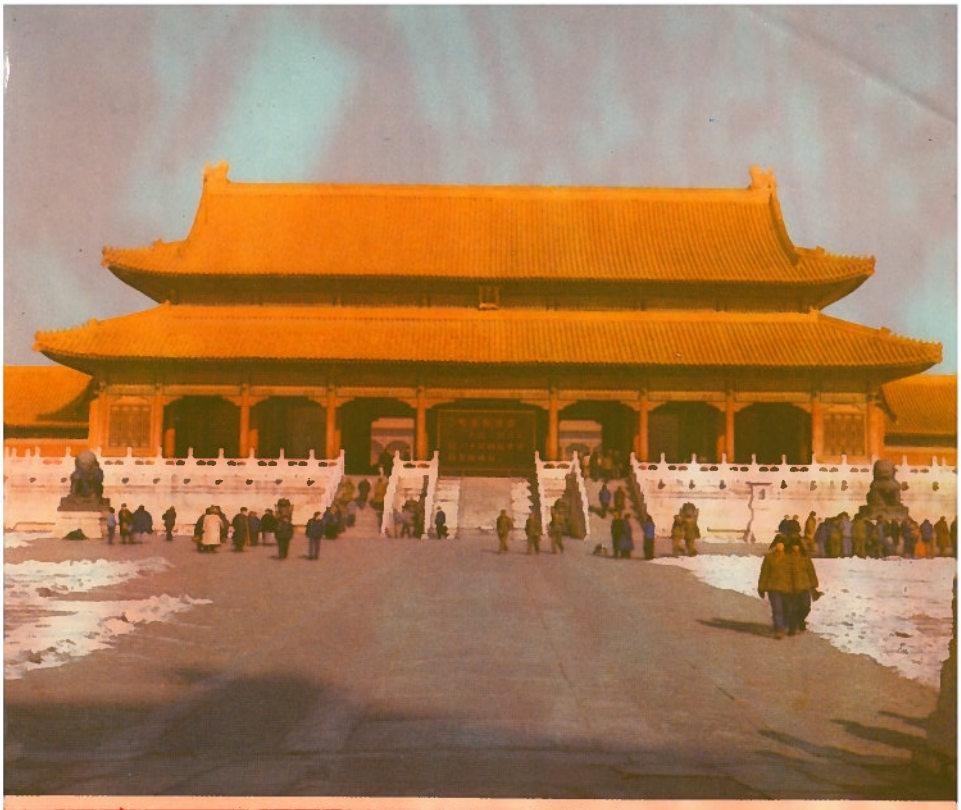
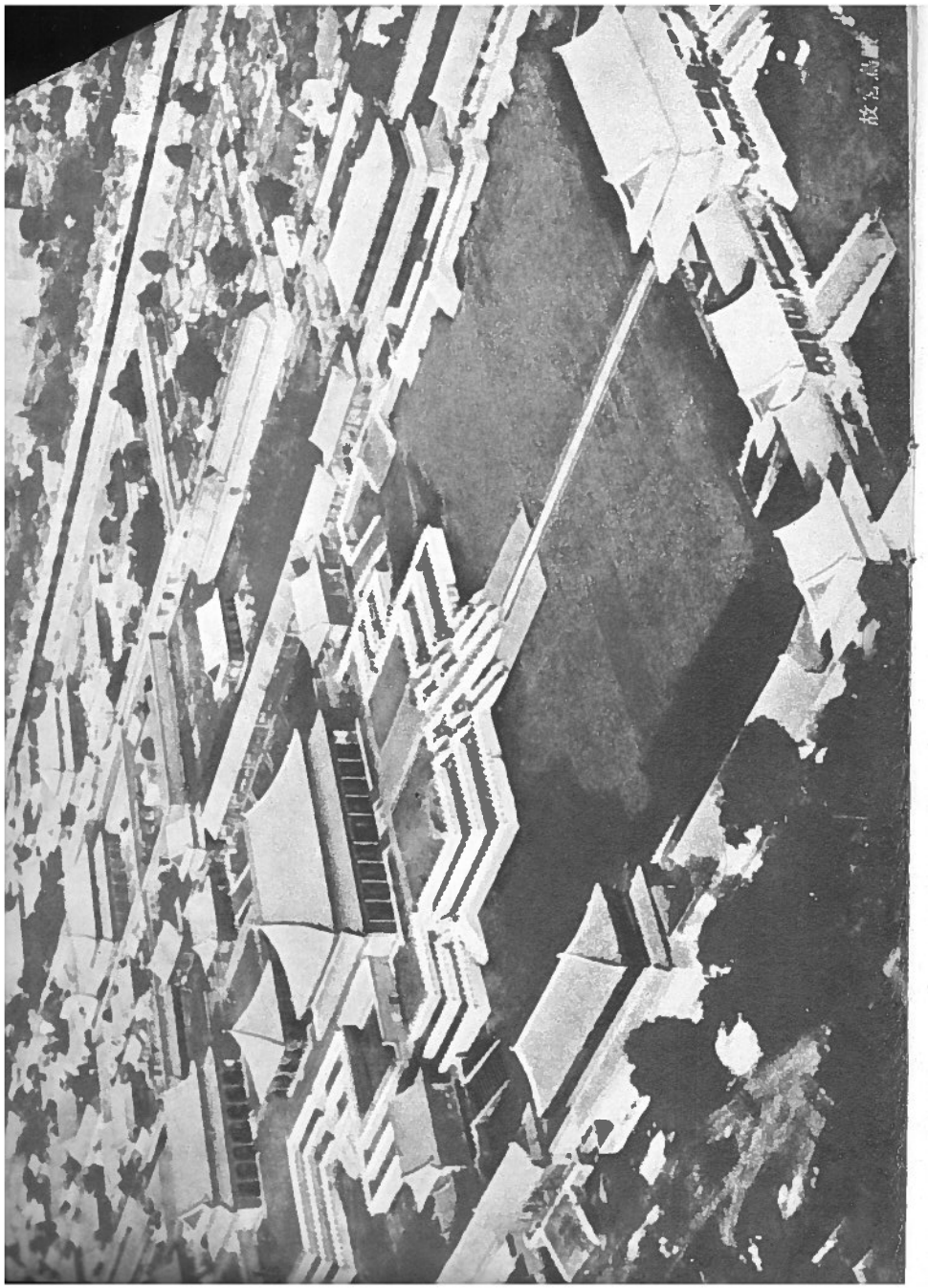


The Former IMPERIAL PALACES



THE Imperial Palaces of the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties, popularly known as the Forbidden City, began to be built in 1406-1420 (4th-18th years of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign). Later, they were reconstructed or restored. They have a history of over 500 years.

Occupying an area of 720,000 square metres with over 9,000 rooms, the palaces are the largest and most complete group of ancient buildings which China has preserved to the present. The grandeur and magnificence of the structure fully demonstrate the wisdom, talent and highly accomplished building technique of China's ancient labouring people.

The palaces are mainly divided into two parts. The front part consists of the Three Big Halls — T'ai Ho Tien (Hall of Supreme Harmony), Chung Ho Tien (Hall of Middle Harmony) and Pao Ho Tien (Hall of Preserving Harmony). From here the Ming and Ch'ing emperors issued edicts and decrees and held important ceremonies. The rear part consists of Ch'ien Ch'ing Kung (Palace of Heavenly Purity), Chiao T'ai Tien (Hall of Union), K'un Ning Kung (Palace of Earthly Tranquility), the Six East and West Palaces, and Yü Hua Yüan (Imperial Garden). These were places where the emperors studied and dealt with state affairs and where they and their families lived and spent their leisure hours.

The palaces were the centre of political rule during the Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties.

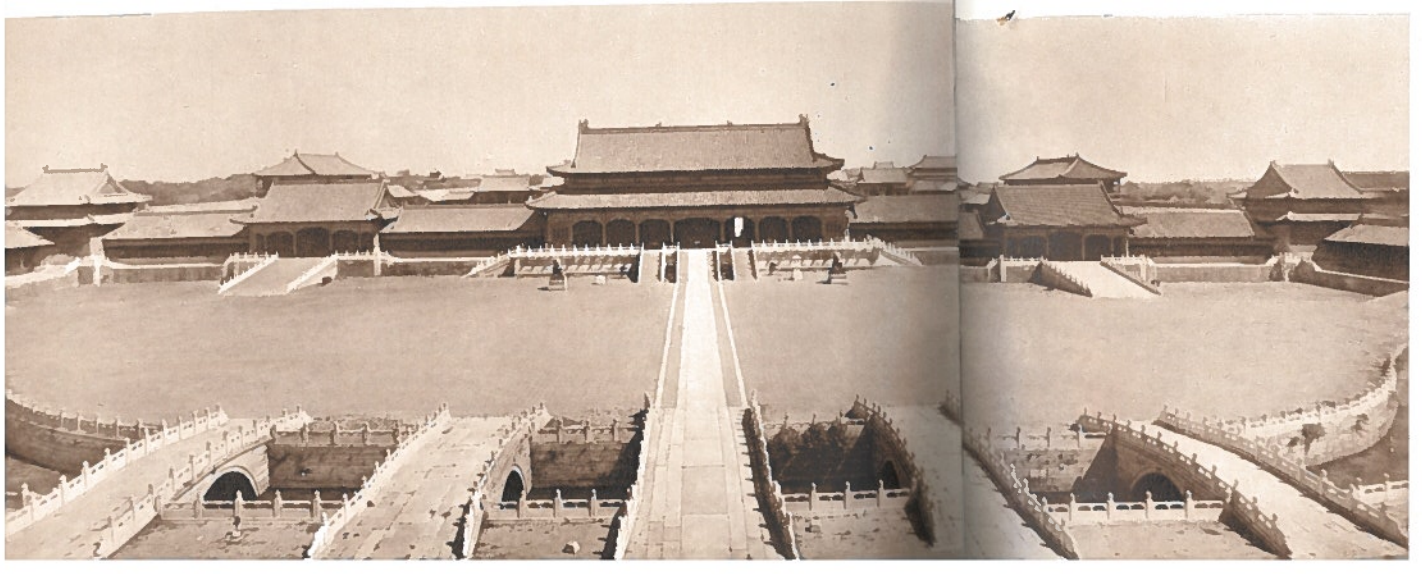
Wu Men

Wu Men (Meridian Gate) is the front entrance to the Forbidden City. It was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and repaired in 1647 (4th year of Ch'ing Emperor Shun Chih's reign).

Meridian Gate,

Bronze Lion at Gate of Supreme Harmony

Gate of Supreme Harmony, Gold Stream Bridge



T'ai Ho Tien

T'ai Ho Tien (Hall of Supreme Harmony), popularly called "Hall of Golden Bells", was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and rebuilt in 1697 (36th year of Ch'ing Emperor K'ang Hsi's reign). It is 35 metres high and has an area of 2,377 square metres. It is the tallest and largest of the palace buildings.

The interior of Hall of Supreme Harmony

A view of Hall of Supreme Harmony

Here the Ming and Ch'ing emperors held important ceremonies on occasions of accession, birthday, lunar New Year, or the winter solstice.

Chung Ho Tien

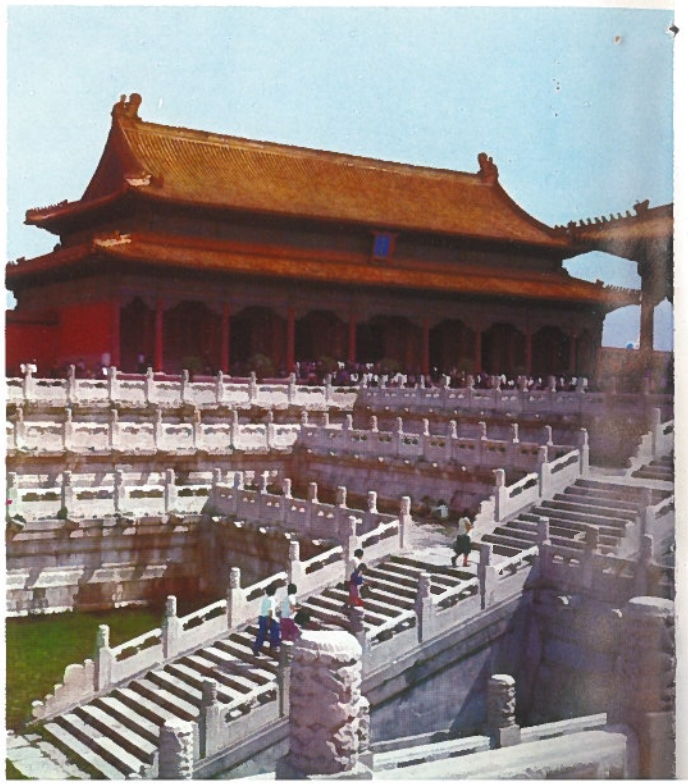
Chung Ho Tien (Hall of Middle Harmony) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and rebuilt in 1627 (7th year of T'ien Ch'i's reign). It was repaired in 1690 (29th year of Ch'ing Emperor K'ang Hsi's reign).

Before holding ceremonies in T'ai Ho Tien, the emperor first came here to receive the attendants.

Pao Ho Tien

Pao Ho Tien (Hall of Preserving Harmony) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign), rebuilt in 1625 (5th year of T'ien Ch'i's reign), and repaired in 1765 (30th year of Ch'ing Emperor Ch'ien Lung's reign).

In 1789 (54th year of Ch'ien Lung's reign), this hall became the site of the "palace examination", which was the highest stage in the feudal imperial examination system. Those who passed this examination were called Chin Shih and the first three on the list were called Chuang Yüan, Pang Yen and T'an Hua.



The steps and balustrade of Hall of Preserving Harmony

Stepping stone carved with clouds and dragons at the back of Hall of Preserving Harmony

Carved Stone at the "Dragon Pavement" behind Pao Ho Tien

This is the largest stone carving in the palaces, a work of Ming period. It was recarved in 1761 (26th year of Ch'ing Emperor Ch'ien Lung's reign). It is 16.57 metres long, 3.07 metres wide and 1.70 metres thick and weighs about 250 tons.

Ch'ien Ch'ing Kung

Ch'ien Ch'ing Kung (Palace of Heavenly Purity) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign). It was destroyed and rebuilt several times. The last time it was rebuilt in 1798 (3rd year of Ch'ing Emperor Chia Ch'ing's reign).

From the Ming to early Ch'ing period the emperor lived and handled routine affairs here. Ch'ing Emperor Yung Cheng moved to Yang Hsin Tien (Hall of Mental Cultivation) but still gave audience to officials of different ranks here.

Gate of Heavenly Purity

Palace of Heavenly Purity

Chiao T'ai Tien

Chiao T'ai Tien (Hall of Union) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and rebuilt in 1655 (12th year of Ch'ing Emperor Shun Chih's reign). Here the Ch'ing empresses held birthday celebrations.

In 1746 (11th year of Ch'ing Emperor Ch'ien Lung's reign) the emperor's 25 seals were kept here.

There is also a clepsydra (water clock) which was a time piece in ancient China. This method of recording time by dripping water was invented about 2,500 years ago, a creation of Chinese labouring people in ancient times. This water clock was made in 1745 (10th year of Ch'ien Lung's reign). On the west side is a striking-clock (mechanical clock) made by the Works Department of the Board of Imperial Household in 1797 (2nd year of Chia Ch'ing's reign).

K'un Ning Kung

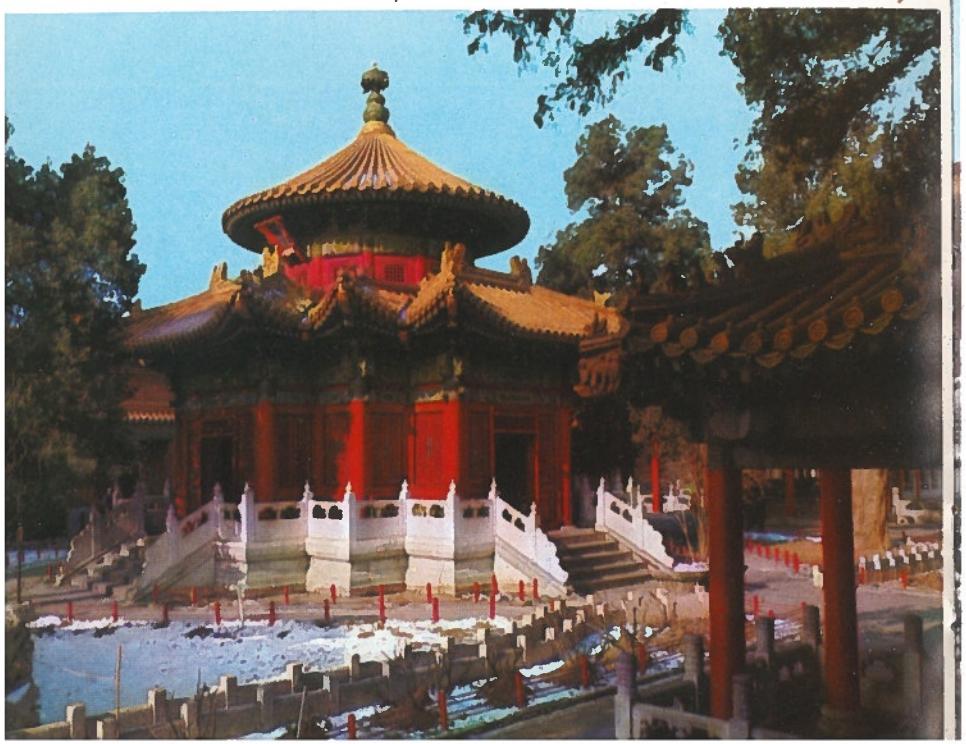
K'un Ning Kung (Palace of Earthly Tranquility) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and rebuilt in 1655 (12th year of Ch'ing Emperor Shun Chih's reign).

The Ming empresses lived here. The Ch'ing rulers changed this place into a place for offering sacrifices to gods. The Eastern Side-room was the emperor's bridal chamber.

Yu Hua Yuan

Yü Hua Yüan (Imperial Garden) was built in Ming period. It has an area of over 7,000 square metres. There are pines and cypresses several hundred years old interposed with rocks of various kinds. To the north side is a rockery hill. It was a place where the Ming and Ch'ing emperors passed their leisure hours.

Imperial Garden



Ch'in An Tien

Built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign), Ch'in An Tien (Hall of Royal Peace) was rebuilt in 1535 (14th year of Ming Emperor Chia Ching's reign). Its flat roof of four-slope style is rarely seen in ancient architecture. The balustrades with Ming stone carvings are fine works of art.

Here the Ming and Ch'ing emperors offered sacrifices to the Taoist God Hsüan-wu.

Grand Council

In 1729 (7th year of Ch'ing Emperor Yung Cheng's reign) the Ch'ing emperor established the Grand Council. With the assistance of the Grand Counsellors, the emperor dealt with the military and political affairs. This is the Grand Counsellors on-duty room.

Yang Hsin Tien

Yang Hsin Tien (Hall of Mental Cultivation) was built in Ming period and repaired during Ch'ing Emperor Yung Cheng's reign. In the 200 years from Yung Cheng's time to the end of the Ch'ing rule, the emperor mostly lived and handled routine affairs here.

The central room was where the emperor received officials of different ranks. The western room was his office in which he read and wrote orders on the memorials submitted by officials and discussed military and political affairs with civil and military officials. The eastern room was where Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi took charge of state affairs "behind a screen". It was here that the Ch'ing government signed the

Eastern Side-room of Hall of Mental Cultivation

document of abdication after the Revolution of 1911. The back room was the emperor's bed-room. Close by the western room is the Three-Rare Hall, so-called because the Ch'ing Emperor Ch'ien Lung kept here three rare pieces of calligraphy — "*The Clear Sky after Pleasant Snow*" by Wang Hsi-chih, the "*Mid-Autumn*" by Wang Hsien-chih and the "*Po Yüan*" by Wang Hsün, all of the Tsin Dynasty (4th century).

T'ai Chi Tien

Built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign), T'ai Chi Tien (Hall of the Absolute) was first called Wei Yang Kung (Palace of endlessness), then renamed Ch'i Hsiang Kung (Palace of Blessings) in Chia Ching period of Ming Dynasty. In 1683 (22nd year of the Ch'ing Emperor K'ang Hsi's reign), it was rebuilt. Later it was named T'ai Chi Tien. It was also where the empresses and imperial concubines of Ming and Ch'ing periods lived.

T'i Yuan Tien

Originally it was Ch'ang Ch'un Men (Eternal Spring Gate) rebuilt into T'i Yüan Tien (Hall of Manifest Origin), in 1810 (15th year of Ch'ing Emperor Chia Ch'ing's reign). Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi once lived here.

Ch'ang Ch'un Kung

Ch'ang Ch'un Kung (Palace of Eternal Spring) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and rebuilt in 1683 (22nd year of Ch'ing Emperor K'ang Hsi's reign). When Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi lived here, she often attended opera.

A view of Palace of Eternal Spring

Yi K'un Kung

Yi K'un Kung (Palace of Blessings to Mother Earth) was built in 1417 (15th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign). It was originally called Wan An Kung (Myriad Peace Palace). It took the present name during the reign of Ming Emperor Chia Ching. It was rebuilt in 1655 (12th year of Ch'ing Emperor Shun Chih's reign). In the Ming and Ch'ing period the empresses and imperial concubines lived here.

T'i Ho Tien

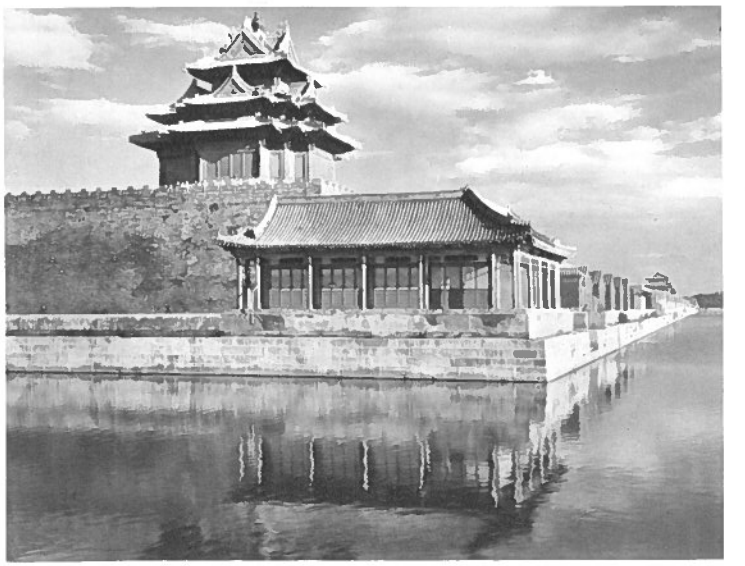
T'i Ho Tien (Hall of Manifest Harmony) was rebuilt from Ch'u Hsiu Men (Gate of Gathering Excellence) in 1802 (7th year of Ch'ing Emperor Chia Ch'ing's reign). When Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi celebrated her fiftieth birthday, a banquet was held here.

Eastern Side-room of the Palace of Gathering Excellence

Ch'u Hsiu Kung

Ch'u Hsiu Kung (Palace of Gathering Excellence) was built in 1420 (18th year of Ming Emperor Yung Lo's reign) and rebuilt in 1655 (12th year of Ch'ing Emperor Shun Chih's reign). The empresses and imperial concubines of Ming and Ch'ing courts lived here. Empress Dowager Tz'u Hsi once lived here.

One of the corner towers of the Forbidden City



List of Emperors of Ming and Ch'ing Dynasties

Ming (A.D. 1368 – 1644)

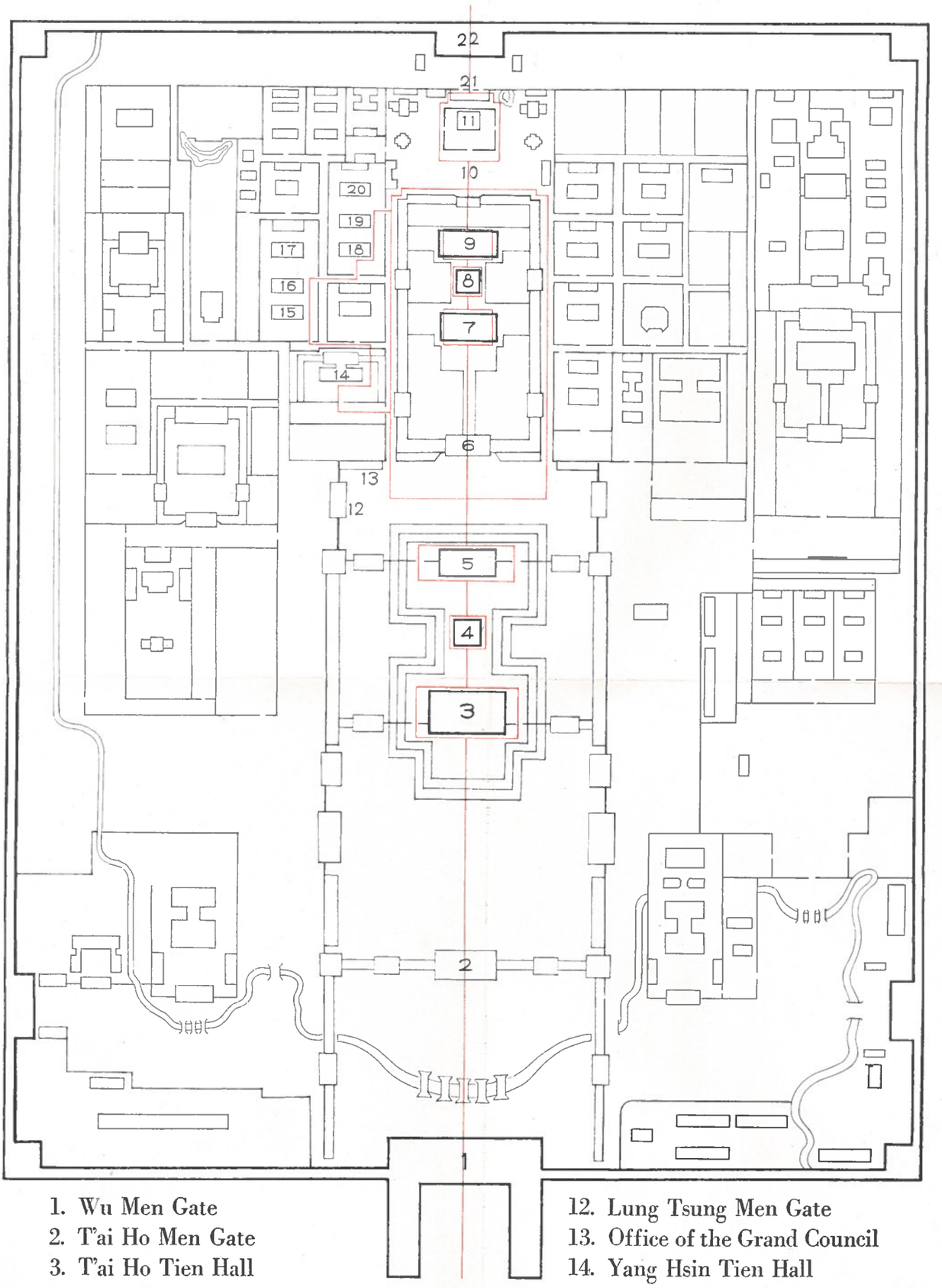
Hung Wu	1368 – 1398
Chien Wen	1399 – 1402
Yung Lo	1403 – 1424
Hung Hsi	1425
Hsüan Teh	1426 – 1435
Cheng T'ung	1436 – 1449
Ching T'ai	1450 – 1456
T'ien Shun	1457 – 1464
Ch'eng Hua	1465 – 1487
Hung Chih	1488 – 1505
Cheng Teh	1506 – 1521
Chia Ching	1522 – 1566
Lung Ch'ing	1567 – 1572
Wan Li	1573 – 1620
T'ai Ch'ang	1620
T'ien Ch'i	1621 – 1627
Ch'ung Chen	1628 – 1644

Ch'ing (A.D. 1644 – 1911)

Shun Chih	1644 – 1661
K'ang Hsi	1662 – 1722
Yung Cheng	1723 – 1735
Ch'ien Lung	1736 – 1795
Chia Ch'ing	1796 – 1820
Tao Kuang	1821 – 1850
Hsien Feng	1851 – 1861
T'ung Chih	1862 – 1874
Kuang Hsü	1875 – 1908
Hsüan T'ung	1909 – 1911

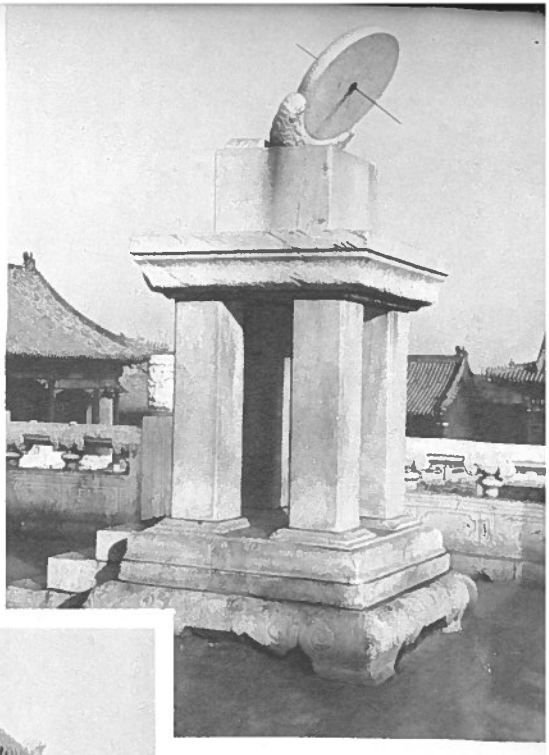
PALACE MUSEUM

Visitors' Guide Map



1. Wu Men Gate
2. T'ai Ho Men Gate
3. T'ai Ho Tien Hall
4. Chung Ho Tien Hall
5. Pao Ho Tien Hall
6. Ch'ien Ch'ing Men Gate
7. Ch'ien Ch'ing Kung Palace
8. Chiao T'ai Tien Hall
9. K'un Ning Kung Palace
10. Imperial Garden
11. Ch'in An Tien Hall
12. Lung Tsung Men Gate
13. Office of the Grand Council
14. Yang Hsin Tien Hall
15. T'ai Chi Tien Hall
16. T'i Yüan Tien Hall
17. Ch'ang Ch'un Kung Palace
18. Yi K'un Kung Palace
19. T'i Ho Tien Hall
20. Ch'u Hsiu Kung Palace
21. Shun Chen Men Gate
22. Shen Wu Men Gate

The Sun Dial, a time piece invented in China at very early times, was already very popular among the people during the Ch'in and Han Dynasties (221 B.C.-A.D. 220). The Sun Dials in the palaces were set up in the Ming or early Ch'ing period.



Chia Liang

A measure which had existed in China's early history. It was a standard measure in feudal society.

Front cover: Gate of Supreme Harmony

Inside cover: A panorama view of the palaces

故 宮